

Volume II, Chapter 2

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# “Madame, auriez-vous une pomme de terre?” / “Madame, can you spare a potato?”

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How narrative inquiry can be used as pedagogy to understand the soldier experience in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and World War I.

Katie Gulledge



# Introduction

With its focus on one soldier's experience, this chapter illustrates a narrative inquiry approach to historical research about World War I with a particular focus on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that asks questions about a specific story and looks for deeper understanding of the context in which it is set. It seeks to understand how people use narratives to create meaning in their lives. In this case, the research focuses on the story of a young Army private from North Carolina who served in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in France, in 1918. The chapter title is both a quote from a story told by the soldier himself to his grandchildren and a focal point for the author's research about it that was carried out 100 years later. The project is informed by oral history and numerous primary sources including letters, pictures, draft cards, discharge papers and other government documents. Resources from the American Battle Monuments Commission, including the ABMC burial register, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (the Blue Book), and the World War I Timeline available through [abmc.gov](http://abmc.gov), provided background information about the soldier's experience during major military offensives including the Meuse-Argonne campaign. In addition, a visit to the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery

along with major battlefields and villages near Verdun, France served as site visits to complete the narrative research. The chapter demonstrates how narrative inquiry creates soldier narratives that allow for a deeper understanding of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in World War I. The chapter has two primary objectives. First, it is a "how to" guide for using narrative inquiry to recreate soldier narratives. Secondly, it illuminates information about the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and World War I through the narrative of an American soldier. The chapter explores his life before, during and after war. Teachers can use this chapter as a model for how to select soldiers from their school's county to develop a similar narrative of World War I experience using the ABMC resources.

# Research Overview

*“The story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meaning allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing the place for the first time” (Richardson 1997)*

I remember from my childhood a story that was frequently repeated at family gatherings. The story was originally told by my great-grandfather, an infantry soldier in World War I, regarding a memory he had from his time spent fighting in France. This story was passed down through three generations and became the inspiration for my research chapter. In the story, Will McGuirt recounts a moment when he was in a small village outside of Verdun, hungry as the rations for entrenched soldiers were becoming increasingly meager. On a patrol near a village, he saw a French woman with a basket on her arm and asked of her, “Madame, auriez-vous une pomme de terre ?” In English this means, “Madame, can you spare a potato?”

My Mother, who recalls first hearing the story from her grandfather at about age 10, found it exotic and amazing that he could speak French, especially since he had so little formal schooling. She learned from him how to repeat the question and, later, chose French as her high school foreign language since she felt she already had a head start learning it. The story was passed down to me and served as an anecdote that I could share with friends growing up and with my students when I taught about World War I.

As I began to think about how I wanted to “Bring the War Back Home” to American students, this story kept coming up in my own mind. I wondered where this story might have actually taken place. How did my great-grandfather learn French? Were there even potatoes growing in the part of France where he was stationed? I even wondered if the story was true. I realized that for my family, this story had animated our understanding of World War I but I wanted to know more about the context and plausibility of the story. Those questions prompted my own inquiry into historical documents and plans for travel to France and the American battlefields where my great-grandfather had served.

The story of the quest for the potato led me to a variety of people and places. A research technique called "narrative inquiry" was the strategy I followed in collecting information because it accommodates a specific and personal perspective based on an oral history. The potato story provided the starting point for inquiry from which I discovered many additional facts and gained insight into hardship and an unforgettable kindness, how war forges bonds and unconventional connections, the significance of small gestures, and the long memories that stories can preserve. In this chapter, I share a 100-year-old recollection that had unique meaning in each of the subsequent three generations. My great-grandfather's simple question inspired many more questions a century later.

Teaching about any war is a pedagogical challenge. There are a number of ethical imperatives that are involved: to convey truth about both the aims and outcomes of war, to respect those who suffered from it, and also to be considerate of the developmental level of students. Learning about the soldier's experience can help to solve this pedagogical challenge. Using American Battle Monuments Commission resources, students can investigate the personal stories of soldiers. This creates a learning experience that is both honest and intriguing while acknowledging the sacrifices and achievements of the U.S. armed forces during World War I. Stories of soldiers like Will McGuirt and the others that fought in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive can inspire students to ask questions that will broaden their own understanding of war

while also keeping the memory of World War I alive. My own experience through historical research provides a model for the exciting process of inquiry and the learning that can emerge through personal connections. It is my hope that Will McGuirt's story passes to them with the expectation that there is a momentum for learning that it carries; hopefully a spark that will ignite their own curiosity.

*Below are the questions that will serve as guides for this chapter:*

1. How can teachers and/or students use Will McGuirt's narrative to understand the soldiers' experience during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and World War I?
2. How do teachers and /or students research the historical agency of the everyday person involved in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and World War I using the American Battle Monuments Commission resources?

# Research Methodology

## What is narrative inquiry?

“Narrative inquiry is the methodology that asks questions about a specific story and looks for deeper understanding of the context in which it is set. One way that narrative inquiry is unique in its study of life experience is the emphasis that it places on the story.” (Creswell 2008)

This chapter uses two forms of narrative inquiry: individual and life experience. Both of these forms narrow the research focus providing a voice for one person as opposed to those of a larger group. In this chapter the research identifies one soldier, Will McGuirt, and poses questions which guide research about his participation in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Educators could also use other examples of more prominent figures involved in World War I as a basis for narrative inquiry. For example, one might use Gustav Princip, the assassin who killed Duke Ferdinand and his wife, thereby setting in motion the events that led to World War I, as a focal point for understanding the war. Using him as a guideline we might ask the following questions: what life experience led him to plot an assassination? Did his

parents raise him with these beliefs or did he have a life altering experience ?

## What is a narrative?

“A narrative, in the context of narrative inquiry, is often a story about a significant event or experience in an individual’s life.” (Wiebe 2009)

Narratives are spoken or written accounts of events that happen in people’s lives. People make choices in the way they retell certain events or what memories they choose to communicate. In the case of my Great Grandfather, he retold one story that represented his entire time fighting in France. Analyzing not only the story, but also his decision to retell that particular story, provides a unique perspective into the impact of World War I on an individual soldier. This process could also be done with other individuals involved with World War I. If we continue with the Princip example, we would provide a biography of this young man's tragic choices, including his death from tuberculosis during the war to which he contributed, and contextualize his life experiences in the early 1900s within broader social, military, and economic changes.

## **Why is narrative inquiry appropriate for the classroom?**

Narrative inquiry has many uses in the classroom. First, narratives help students feel connected to the author and create a sense of community. For example, a soldier's narrative connects students to the broader subject matter of war. This connection can create a deeper understanding of the subject.

“When a story is well told, the listener or reader may feel a sense of connection to the teller.” (Creswell 2008).

Narratives also help “hook” learners into new content. A narrative can engage learners to want to know more. A story can serve as a facilitator of learning. Finally, narratives are universal. “Stories can cross generational and cultural boundaries, they can offer a common point of entry into an experience” (Creswell 2008).

# Research Process

In the following section, you will find a narrative of the life of infantry soldier, Will McGuirt. The narrative is based on research collected both in North Carolina and France. Sources include photographs, letters, research military aids, site visits to the ABMC Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, battlefields, French villages, and interviews with various subjects. My research began locally with family members and during my investigation one aunt discovered a box of artifacts in her attic which contained Will McGuirt's uniform, gas mask and helmet. The faded "Wildcat" patch affixed to his uniform provided the key to my Great Grandfather's military past; he was a member of The 81st "Wildcat" Division. With this vital piece of the puzzle, I was able to utilize search aids such as *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (ABMC 1938). In addition, databases such as Fold3, Ancestry, N.C. Digital Archives, National Military records and the ABMC Burial Database in order to gather more information about the 81st "Wildcat" Division, in particular the 322nd Infantry Regiment. The discovery of Will McGuirt's military registration card on Ancestry provided his dates of service, which in turn unearthed his training camp and deployment locations. Pictures from the National Archives helped to illustrate scenes from U.S.

deployment sites. Letters provided insight into the thoughts of soldiers that fought alongside him. The site visits to the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery, battlefields, and French villages provided opportunities to see and feel the terrain on which he fought. Interviews with locals in France gave insight and perspective into Will McGuirt's experience with rural villagers. Through this research, I came to know my great-grandfather, but on a broader scale, I came to know many of the soldiers that fought in World War I.

# The Life of Will McGuirt: Before, During, and After World War I

**Teacher Note:** The following narrative tells the story of the life of Will McGuirt. His story has been divided into four sections: Life Before Deployment, Deployment/Fighting in France, Life After Armistice and Homeward Bound/Post-War. Teachers can use some or all of the parts of Will McGuirt's story to guide student understanding of World War One. Each section is designed to help students analyze war from the perspective of a soldier. At the end of each section are teacher notes. These notes include both guiding questions, which can be used to facilitate discussion, as well as additional activities to other classroom extensions.

## Section One: Life Before Deployment

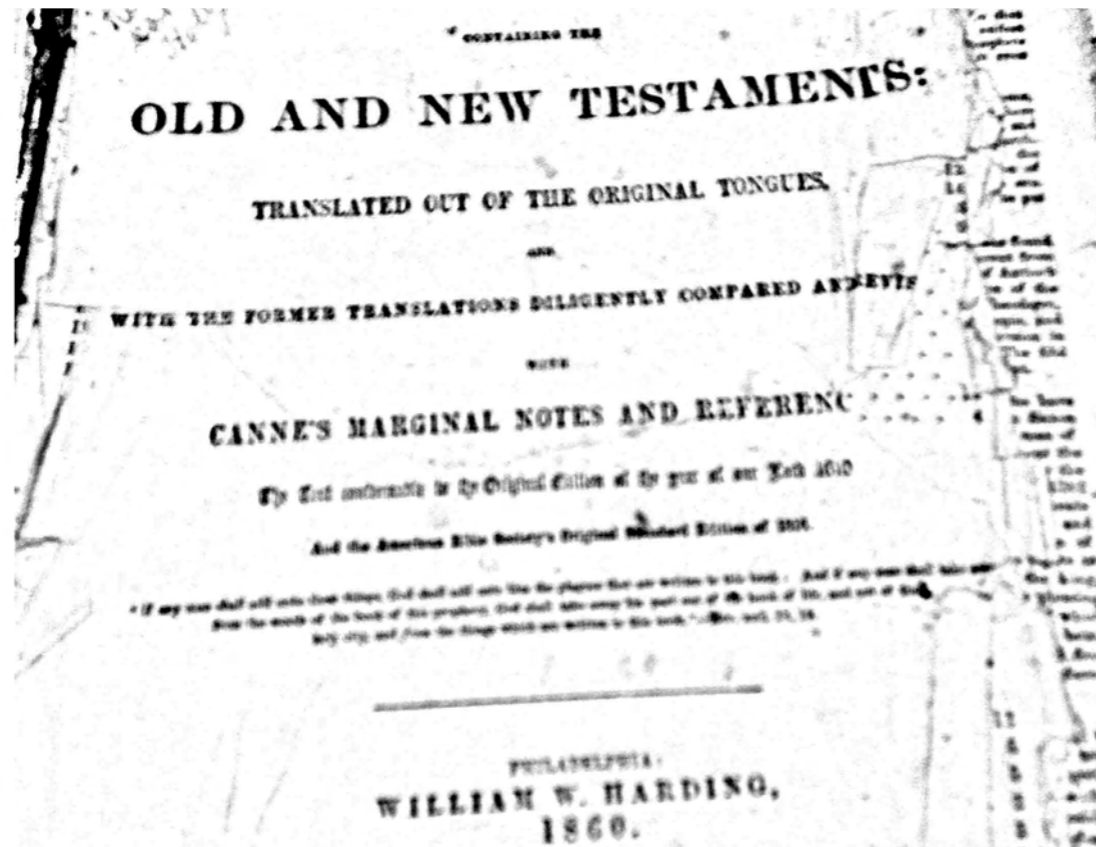
Will McGuirt was an ordinary man who had an extraordinary experience as an American soldier in World War I. He was born on September 18, 1894 and died on January 23, 1983. He grew up in rural North Carolina, went to Salem Baptist church every Sunday with his parents, brothers and sisters, worked on the farm where they made their living and went to the local one-room school for as many grades as the school offered. In this case, it

Will McGuirt



Source: McGuirt Family Archives.





Pages from Will McGuirt's family bible record his birth



was fifth grade. It is likely that he would have lived a lifetime within a fifty mile radius of Monroe, N.C. Will McGuirt's life changed forever when he was called to serve in the U.S. Army like all other able-bodied young men where he lived at the time. He got the word that he could enlist or he would be drafted. He knew he might get put in the Navy if he didn't go in to sign up on his own; he didn't know anything about ships, so he went to the county court house and signed up for the Army, thinking he knew how to manage on dry land but had never seen a body of water bigger than a lake. He had knowledge about horses and hunting with a

shotgun and figured he'd feel more at home on land- so the Army it was. Soon thereafter he was on his way to France, in the Army, but on a ship; he was off to see things and places that he had never even read about in any book or heard about from any person he ever knew.

### Wildcats

Will McGuirt served from May 25, 1918 through June 25, 1919. He was a member of the 81st Division, 161st Infantry Brigade, 322nd Infantry Regiment, Company J. The "Wildcat" Division was originally organized in August 1917 with drafted soldiers, mostly from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. Approximately one-third of the soldiers were North Carolinians from almost every part of the state. Three units in the division, the 321st Infantry Regiment, the 316th Field Artillery Regiment, and the 321st Ambulance Company, were made up almost exclusively of North Carolinians. The division was called the "Wildcat" Division in recognition of the wildcats that inhabited southern states and after Wildcat Creek, which ran near Camp Jackson, S.C., where the unit was mobilized. The men adopted a wildcat silhouette as a shoulder patch, one of the first shoulder insignia worn by troops in the American Expeditionary Force.

### Training in the United States

Will McGuirt traveled from Monroe, N.C. to Columbia, S.C. where he joined the rest of the 81st division, which was organized at Camp Jackson. The 81st Division contained troops from

## Training in the United States



*The 81st Division or "Wildcat" division had a mascot in World War I, Tuffy the wildcat. This tradition continued throughout the division's service in World War II. Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.*



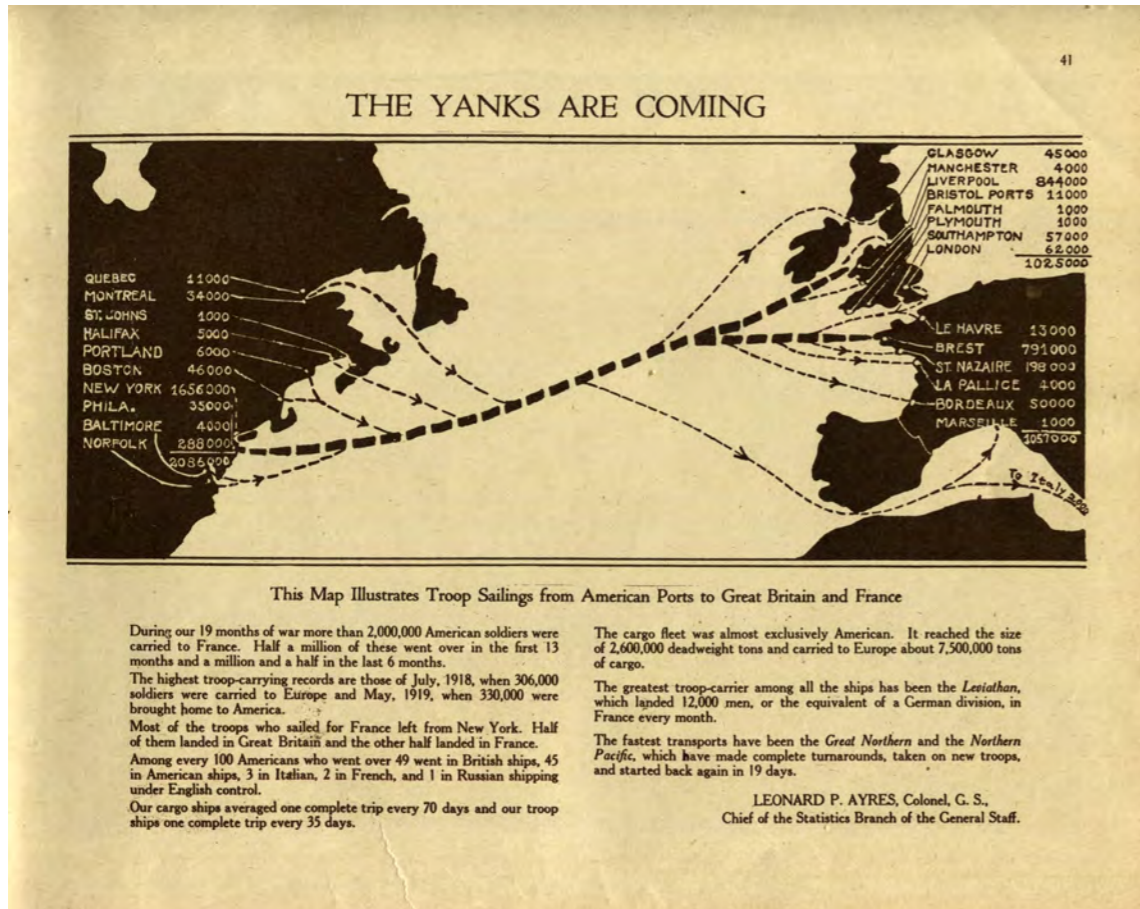
Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. It was one of the first national army divisions to be organized. The following quote from a soldier in the 321st division explains life at Camp Jackson:

*Camp Jackson, on September 5, 1917, when the first men drafted arrived there, was quite different*

*in appearance from what it was a few months later. We, like all new men upon first reaching a military training camp, knew little about what awaited us. The camp was located on a ridge of thickly wooded sand hills. Just enough trees and stumps had been removed to provide for the construction of the large wooden barracks. These training camps were built under government emergency orders, and the contractors left all the finishing touches, and much of the manual labor to the Rookies who were to be trained in them, just as if such work was necessarily a part of their military training. (Johnson 1919).*

In May 1918, the 81st Division was sent to Camp Sevier, near Greenville, South Carolina. "For the first time most of us realized that we were going to war, actually going to fight among bursting shells and dying men. Much of the serious thinking about the grim horrors of war was done during those last days at Sevier." (Johnson 1919) On July 13, the 81st Division began to move via Camps Mills and Upton, New York, to the ports of embarkation of Boston, Brooklyn, Hoboken, New York, and Philadelphia.

## Map of Soldier Travel Log



Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.

**Teacher Note:** Use the following questions after reading section one (*Life Before Deployment*) of Will McGuirt's story to facilitate discussion about preparing for war.

- What inferences can you make about Monroe, NC based on the description?
- Where did Will McGuirt go for soldier training? To what regiment and infantry was he assigned?
- Based on the soldier quote about training, what would be difficult about military training camp?
- Why did the 81st division decide to adopt a mascot? What do you think being a "Wildcat" meant to Will McGuirt or any other member of the division?

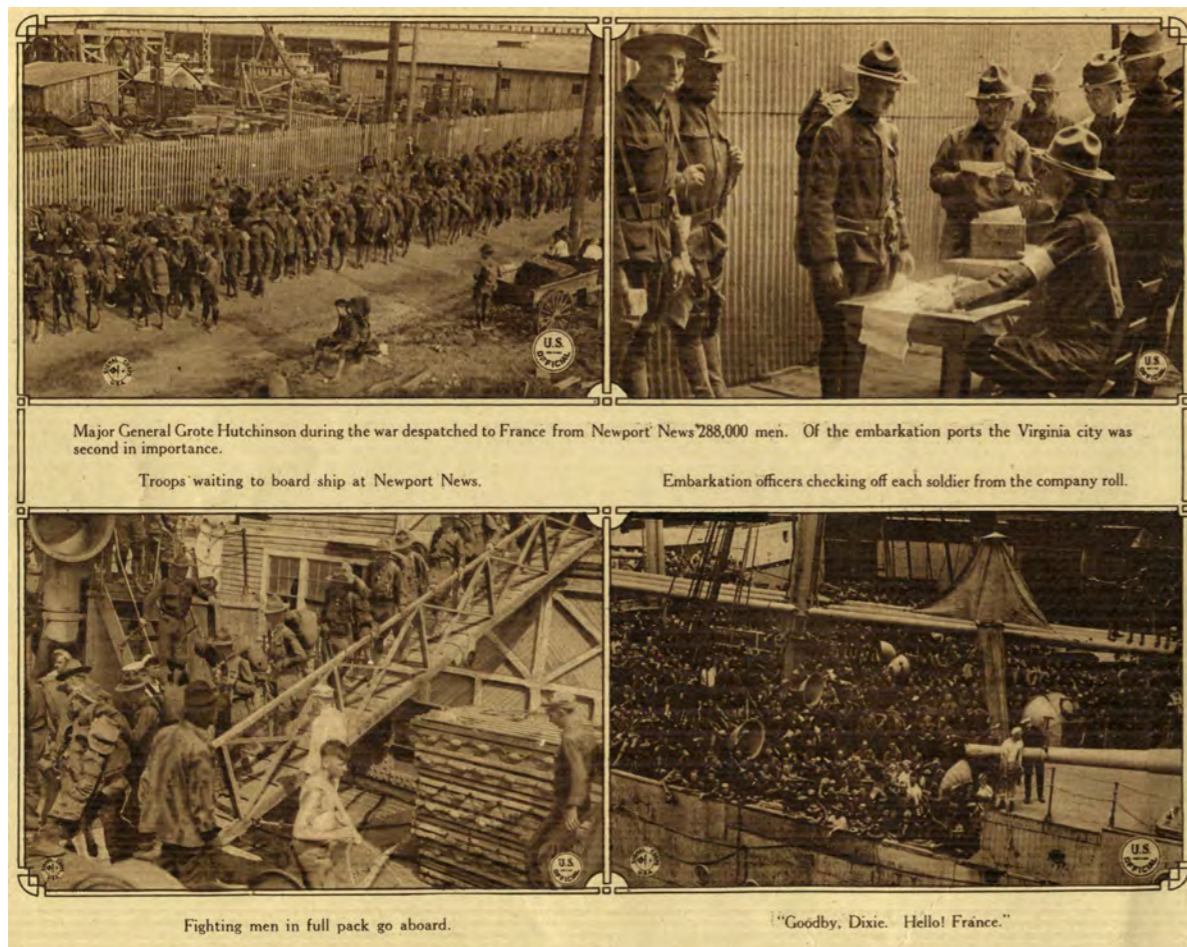
Want to research a World War I casualty from your state? Use the [ABMC Burial Database](#) to locate soldiers from a particular area who are buried in one of the ABMC cemeteries. For example, there are 515 World War I soldiers from North Carolina buried in ABMC cemeteries abroad.

## Section Two: Deployment/Fighting in France

### Will McGuirt Travels from Hoboken to Liverpool

The division began leaving for England on July 30 and the remainder arrived in England by August. The travel by boat from New York to England took twelve days. For Will McGuirt, this was his first time on a boat. Conditions were not favorable. One soldier describes the ship saying, “The urgent need of men in France made it necessary to estimate a boat’s capacity by the

#### Troops Boarding Ships



Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.

standing room a man required, rather than by the number of cubic feet of air and square feet of floor space needed for his health and comfort. This twelve day voyage on these troop ships was a real test of our stomachs, health, patience and morale.” (Johnson 1919). Another summary of life on board the ship says, “The most striking impressions of this voyage may be briefly summed up as follows: The epidemic of seasickness the first night out, of which there was abundant evidence in every part of the boat, owing to the inadequate capacity of the receptacles furnished for the convenience of the seasick patients; the lifeboat drills; the ceaseless watch for submarines; the solitude of mid-ocean; the Northern lights seen from our most northerly point off Newfoundland; the services of the Y.M.C.A. with its books, magazines, writing material, games and graphophone; the feeling that came over us as we sighted land in a foreign country; and the freedom and safety we felt as we walked down the gangplank and set foot on land once more” (Johnson 1919).

Many people from North Carolina came to see soldiers off. One mother wrote a poem to her son that she gave to him before he departed. The poem is called, “A Transport Sails for France.”

## A TRANSPORT SAILS FOR FRANCE.

*A Poem written by a mother of an A.E.F. soldier*

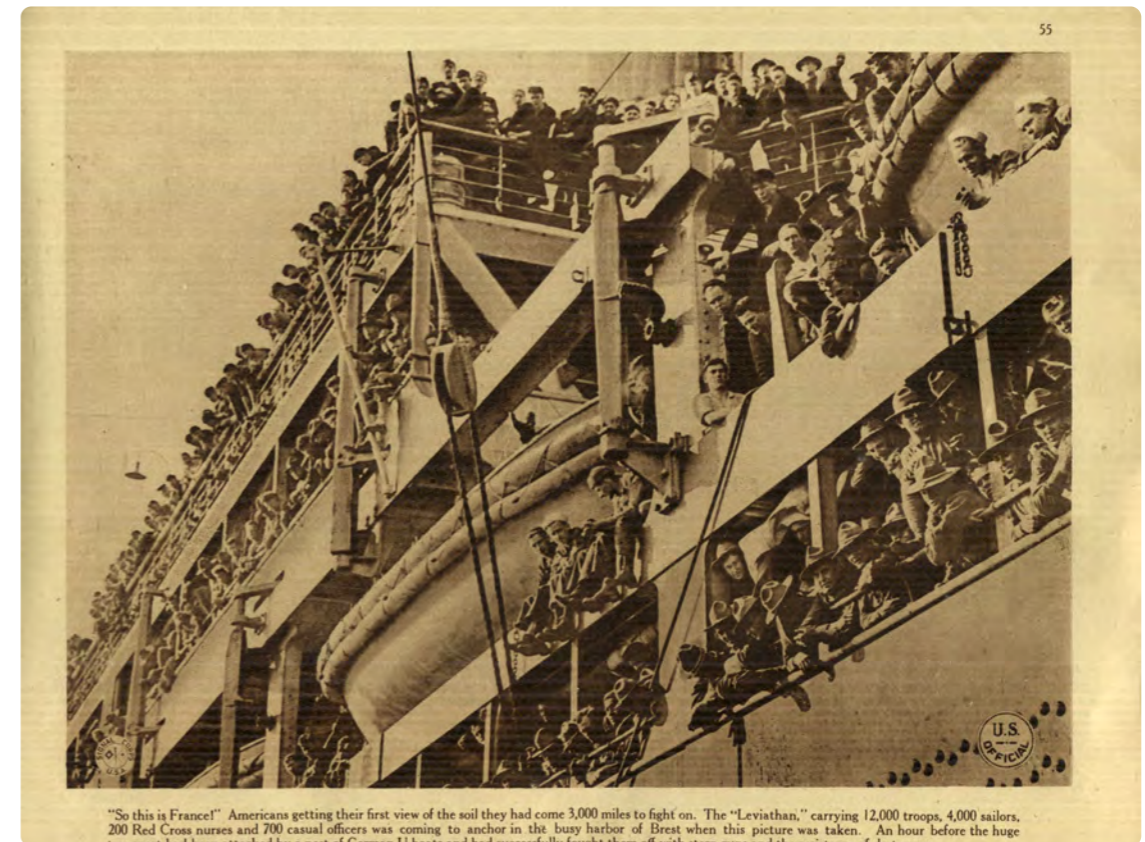
Today my heart sets sail. This trembling heart  
That ne'er before has ventured far beyond  
The encircling walls of home and love, fares out  
Aghast, upon a waste of treacherous waves,  
Beneath whose crested top of glittering white  
Lurks death, with cruel eyes and venomed fangs.  
O heart of mine, be brave to know and bear  
All things which must be borne by his stout heart—  
His heart of steel, which once, short years ago,  
Beat -close beneath thee, feeble, small and weak;  
And follow, follow on, by dark and day,  
Across the long leagues of that lonely sea,  
Until, God willing, loom the shores of France  
Before his eager, waiting, boyish eyes.  
So young to go—but steadfast, unafraid,  
Did I not teach him early to fear naught  
In all the world except to do a wrong?  
He cannot fear who fights for truth and right.  
And I must stay with him in steadfastness,  
Girding my spirit to be brave as his.  
Down every dark, rough road of march he treads,  
My soul shall walk beside. I shall be near,  
Feeling the cold, wet dews of dawn that wash  
His sleeping, upturned face and soft, brown hair.  
I shall hear with him all the noise of war—  
The awful roaring of our rescuing guns,  
Answering the thunders of the enemy;  
See the sad, ravaged lands he goes to save,  
Their little children, homeless, poor and weak.

## Arrival in England

The troops landed in England and proceeded, after a brief stay in rest camps, to Le Havre and Cherbourg, France. Upon their arrival in France, the divisions went to the 16th Tonnerre Training Area for training. On September 14, the division began to move to the vicinity of Bruyeres in the Vosges region.

For Will McGuirt and other local boys, this was the first time they had seen another country. One soldier speaks of this experience

## Arrival in England



*Soldiers Arrive in France for the First Time. Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.*



saying, “This was for the most of us our first day in foreign country, among a people who spoke a different language. Among our first impressions of France was the ancient and quaint aspect of everything. Knowing that we were to live and fight with the French for months to come, we were eager to learn all that we could about them immediately upon our arrival” (Johnson 1919).

### **81st Division in St. Mihiel Offensive**

The 81st Division was sent on September 19 to the St. Dié sector of France's Vosges Mountain region. There, as part of the French Seventh Army, the division held what was considered a quiet front, although it fought off German trench raids and endured artillery bombardments. This area was important to the Germans because it protected the strategic centers of Metz and Briey iron basin. This area was essential to conquer if they wanted to continue to fight between the Meuse River and Argonne Forest.

While serving in the St. Dié sector, the division suffered 116 casualties. The railroads in the vicinity of St. Mihiel had been freed for Allied use. The battle was the first large Allied offensive of the year against a carefully prepared trench system. The clean cut victory of the Americans at St. Mihiel was a turning point (Center of Military History 1995). On October 31, the 81st Division moved to the vicinity of Verdun for the purpose of participating in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive of the American First Army.

### **The 81st Division in the Meuse Argonne Offensive**

In early November 1918, the 81st moved to the front lines near Verdun, where its infantry regiments attacked German lines on the morning of November 9. From the outset, the division encountered heavy machine gun and artillery fire; heavy fog and smoke hindered visibility, but also likely saved American lives in the attack.

By late afternoon, the 322nd Infantry Regiment had captured the ruined village of Moranville. Regiment records describe how Will McGuirt's regiment captured the village:

#### 81st Division in French Village



Imecourt after the 80th Div. had occupied it Nov. 3. The narrow village street is filled with the bustle of activities that always occupied troops during the rush of an advance.

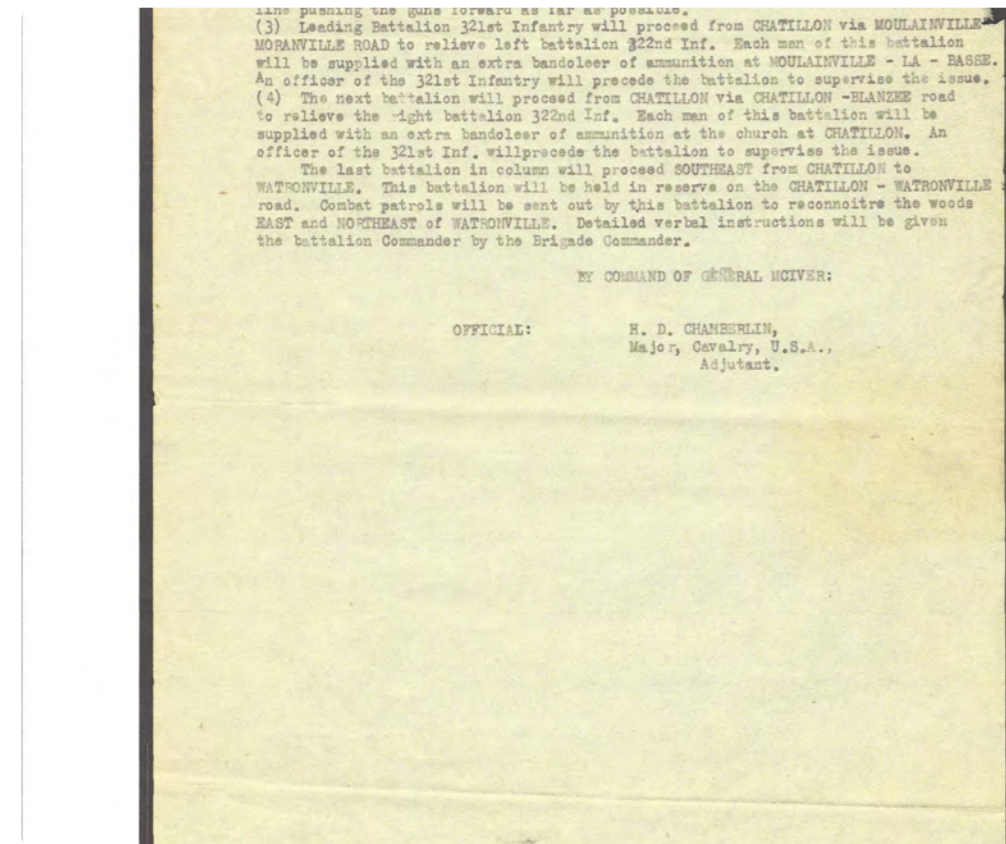
Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.

*“In the zone of action of the 161st Infantry Brigade, the 322 Infantry, attacked at 9 am with its left on the Moulainville-Moranville road. Company F, the right assault company, flanked its opposition by advancing against Moranville from the south, while Company E attacked the town from the northwest. About noon a gap of about 200 meters opened between the two assault companies. The 3d Battalion placed two platoons in this gap at 2:30 pm. These platoons advanced east against Moranville. At 3:30 pm Company M, which had been sent to reinforce a platoon of Company K, came up from the southwest against the town while the remainder of Company K attacked from the west. At 4 p.m. the firing line was still further supported by the entry into the fight of one platoon from Company I, which had taken the place of Company H as left support company of the 2d Battalion. At 4:30 pm. Company F was ordered into position with its left on the town. Its line extended 300 meters across*

*the filled to the south of Moranville. Moranville was captured about 5 pm” (American Battle Commission 1944).*

On the south side of the forest, the 324th Infantry Regiment slowly pushed the enemy back but then abandoned much of the ground by withdrawing to a safer position. The day's fighting produced mixed results, with success north of Bois de Manheulles and frustration south of the forest (Center of Military History 1995). When, on the night of November 10, “Wildcat” Division commanders received no official confirmation of rumors that an armistice might be signed the next day, the 321st and 323rd Infantry Regiments planned a dawn attack on the main German trench line. At daybreak, the 321st went "over the top" for the first time and attacked enemy trench positions north of Bois de Manheulles, slowly advancing through heavy fog and shell and machine gun fire. At 10:30 a.m., the 323rd began to fight its way through the barbed wire entanglements along the German main trench line into and south of Bois de Manheulles; some Americans entered German trenches and many were either killed or pinned down under enemy fire. At 11:00 a.m., the firing abruptly stopped when the armistice of November 11, 1918 ended hostilities (ABMC 1938)

Field Orders Issued on November 10, 1918, the day before the armistice. (American Battle Commission 1944)



Video from the Day in Moranville



Photo Gallery from Moranville



**Teacher Note:** The Power of Place. An essential component to the story of Will McGuirt is the town of Moranville, the village captured by his regiment. A site visit to Moranville in 2014 provided an insightful comparison about life in this village during and after wartime.



Place-based learning connects place with self and community (Knapp 2000). A common theme that emerges from historical research is the “power of place.” The divisional history found in the ABMC Blue Book informed me that the 322nd regiment was responsible for capturing the small village of Moranville. A part of my narrative inquiry was to visit this site in order to understand what it was like for Will McGuirt and other members of the 322nd division.

**Moranville in 2014:** Moranville is an hour and a half drive from Verdun. It is made up of three streets and has a population of around 100. To an outsider, this village appears desolate. There are no shops, schools, or businesses. It is simply a residential village. The village is similar to small rural towns in North Carolina like Monroe, where Will McGuirt was born. It is still a farmer’s village. Cattle and small residential farms accompany most houses. In the middle of the village is a church. This church was rebuilt after World War I, as it was destroyed during combat. The bell of the church was saved, however, as it had fallen into a river, and remained intact. Conversations with residents of Moranville provided additional information about this small village within the larger context of World War I. A local farmer named Marselle spoke of his life in the village of Moranville. He was a farmer and had lived in Moranville his entire life. His parents lived in Moranville but fled at the beginning of World War I. His parents returned to the village after World War I and helped to rebuild the destroyed town. For Marselle, this village represented his family’s commitment to rebuilding after wartime.

**Guiding Questions:**

- How might the village of Moranville have been a comfort to Will McGuirt during World War I?
- If your village was destroyed by the war, would you make the decision to rebuild like Marselle’s parents did? Why or why not?

**Classroom Connection:** Have students investigate an area that was part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Use Google Earth to look at images of the area now.



*Cannon in the French village of Etain.*

**Teacher Note:** Use the following questions after reading section two (Deployment/Fighting in France) of Will McGuirt’s story to facilitate discussion about warfare:

- Describe life on the U.S.S Manchuria for a World War I soldier. What would you see, smell, or hear? What do you think was the hardest challenge for soldiers?
- Read the poem, “A Transport Sails for France” after the section about Will McGuirt traveling to Liverpool. What does this poem and the section about Will McGuirt’s experience on the boat tell us about the hardships of warfare?
- Like Will McGuirt, for many of the soldiers, this was the first time that they had seen another country. How might their arrival in a foreign country have changed them? What do you think it meant to Will McGuirt?
- Locate the areas where Will McGuirt’s regiment fought. Have students find the Vosges Moutnains, St. Die, Maneulles, and Moranville on the [ABMC map](#).
- Soldiers like Will McGuirt knew very little about what was going on outside of their own trench. What do you think it is like to fight without knowing if your side is winning or losing?

**Classroom Extension:** Have students research a particular regiment or division during the Meuse-Argonne or other major World War I offensives. Look at the [ABMC Blue Book’s index](#) (PDF). In the index, you can look up particular regiments or divisions. Next, use the [BlueBook PDF](#) to find corresponding pages with information regarding regiment locations.

### **Section Three: Soldier Life After the Armistice**

Following the armistice, the “Wildcat” Division marched 175 miles to a rest area. After the war the 81st Division remained in France for more than five months. In early June, troops returned to the United States. Sailing began on May 27. The last elements of the division arrived at Newport News on June 24. During the short time the 81st was in combat, it suffered 248 killed and 856 wounded. The men were shipped back to the United States in early June 1919 and discharged from service (Johnson 1919).

The following quotes (Johnson 1919) describe what most soldiers probably felt after the Armistice was signed:

*The night of November 11 stands out unique in the history of mankind. It was the most memorable night since the dawn of the Christian era. It is hardly possible that man will ever again witness an event of more transcendent importance and significance to the entire world than the cessation of hostilities on November 11. That night the bright light of our camp fires dispelled the dreary darkness that had settled like a pall upon northern France every night with the going down of the sun for four long years. Before the night of the 11th, the faint light of a cigarette was the*

*signal for a deadly missile. That night the fields and woods were aglow with bright fires – the signals of peace and victory. The merry laughter and bright, happy faces of the fellows as they sat around their open camp fires told of a joy too deep for words and too sacred for a public demonstration. Such demonstrations as followed the receipt of the news of the Armistice in our cities, would have been as much out of place on the front that day as at the funeral of a great and honored personage. We were on hallowed ground – hallowed and forever made sacred to us by the blood of our own comrades, whose mangled and shell – torn bodies still lay around us on the battlefield.*

*The 175 kilometer hike from the front of this training area in the vicinity of Chatillon-SurSeine will always stand out as one of the greatest feats of our overseas experience. This hike was made with full packs, and with all the accoutrements pertaining to the full and complete equipment of*

*the American soldier. The march covered fifteen days, November 8-December 3, and was a severe test of physical endurance, morale and the jovial, happy disposition of the American soldier.*

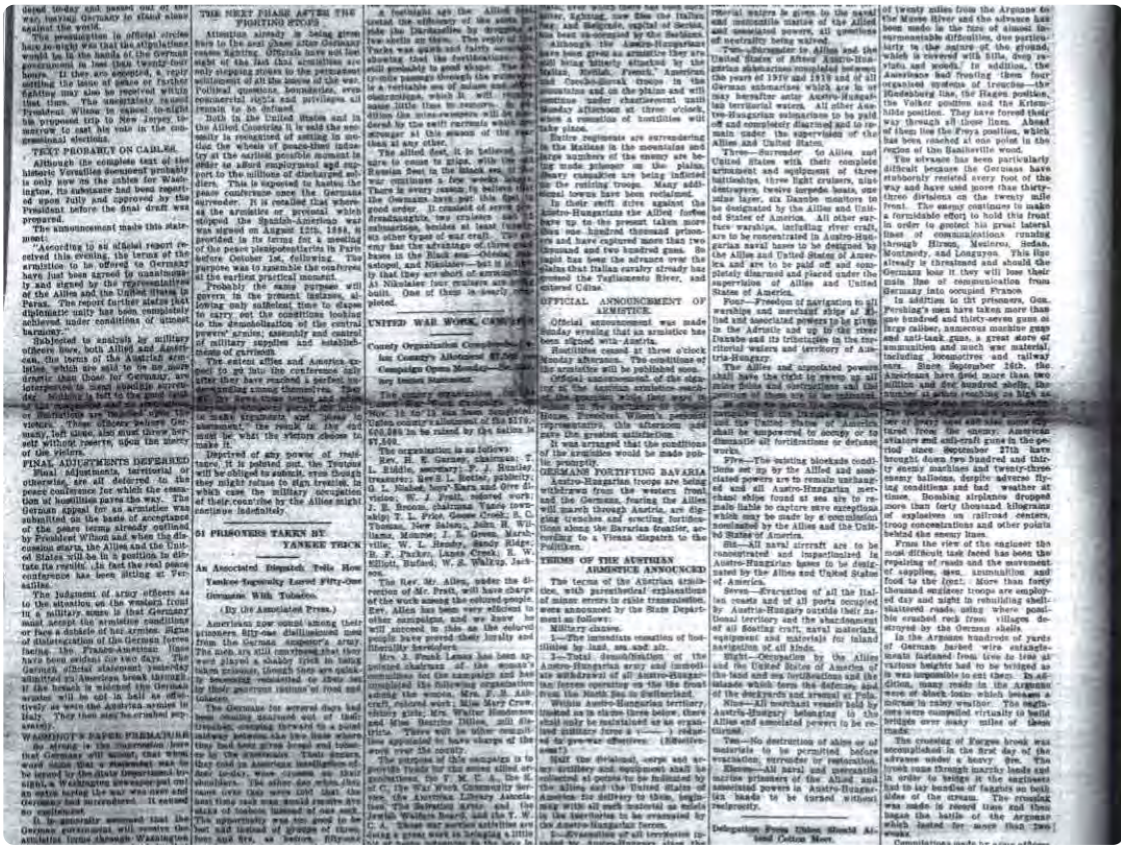
*The distressing, continuous coughing that went on all night long in the billets (usually cow barns) during that march, still haunts us, and the line of skirmisher that was quickly formed, often at double time, immediately after every “fall out” along the road, is still a familiar scene to all of us.*

*Few things in the army require more physical stamina and “guts” than continuous marching day after day with full equipment.*

*There is a bond of sympathy between men who have suffered in common any of the great experiences of life. Those of us who finished this hike together felt more closely bound together than ever by those ties of comradeship that had been established during our stay on the front. We*

also felt that we had something in common with the soldiers of past wars who had made long marches under trying conditions.

### The Monroe Journal



November 5, 1918 - Armistice

Use p. 194-201 of the [ABMC Blue Book index](#) to find pictures of the Meuse-Argonne region post battle.

### After-War Training Area: Life in French Villages

Many men in the 81st "Wildcat" Division reached the after-war training areas around December. It was in these small French villages that after war training areas were set up for soldiers.

"These are typical little villages of rural France. They are inhabited almost solely by French peasants whose customs and habits apparently have not changed since the early days of the French republic."

"These five quiet, secluded little villages with a population varying from 200-300 each were destined to be the home of the 321st for five and one-half months. We should thank our lucky stars that we did not know the duration of our stay upon our arrival"(Johnson 1919, 74).

During this time many soldiers grew accustomed to living in French villages. It is possible that during this time Will McGuirt met the woman that would give him a potato – and thus become the story that was passed down. As one soldier describes, "Most of the French peasants opened their homes and their hearts to us, and showed us a hospitality as genuine and unselfish as our own American homes could have shown the soldiers of any army.."

"(Johnson 1919, 75). During the five and half months that soldiers lived in these villages, life evolved. The A.E.F set up schools for soldiers to attend. The YMCA helped establish different forms of entertainment including sports teams, a theatre group and even a

## After-War Training Area



Villagers Return Home. Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.



“Wildcat” Newspaper. The newspaper had several editions and spoke about American camaraderie including the American Spirit.

It was during this time that there was the creation of the “Wildcat” Veteran’s Association. “The divisional organization would foster the splendid spirit of comradeship that had made us all feel like buddies, perpetuate those high ideals of service and citizenship that had actuated us in our overseas service and arrange for conventions.” (Johnson 1919, 94)

Although the soldiers created a life in France, many spoke of when they would return home. When they finally were given the direction to leave many were saddened as they realized these small French villages had been a second home.

*“We arrived in St. Nazairre early on the morning of June 5. The four days spent here were largely taken up with visits to the delousing plant, bathing, and medical inspections. If medical inspections would keep on well, we have had enough to keep us well till a ripe old age. After being properly deloused, bathed, inspected and fitted out with new clothes, we were pronounced fit for a return trip to our native soil.”(Johnson 1919, 103)*

### Homeward Bound

Members of the 81st division began the return trip home aboard the U.S.S. Manchuria. A soldier describes the moment that he was leaving France:

*Finally that eventful and long looked for day arrived. On the morning of June 9, we heard that the U.S.S. Manchuria was in the docks waiting for*

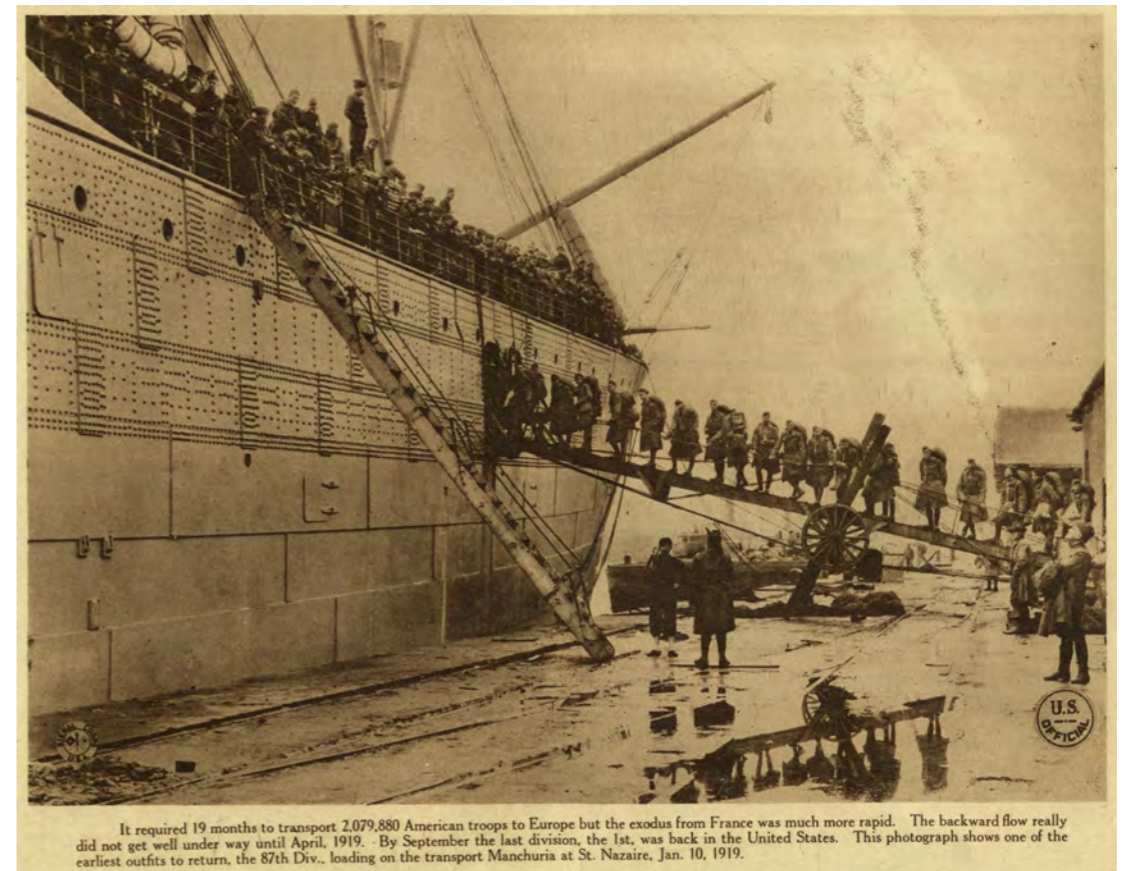
*us to load on. As our boat pulled out from the docks, a large crowd of the French and some American soldiers belonging to other outfits, bade us farewell and shouted “bon voyage.” A French band played the “Marseillaise” and “The Star-Spangled Banner.” We had never dreamed there would be any sadness of farewell for us when we left France, and we certainly did not add any salt tears to the briny deep; yet, the memory of our days in France, fraught as they were with so many thrilling experiences, aroused a sentiment that was not void of emotion. (Johnson 1919)*

For Will McGuirt and other soldiers from the 81st Division, they were not only leaving behind the French people they had come to know but they were also leaving behind the soldiers that did not make it. “The memory of our comrades who had “paid the bill” and would never return stirred us deeply. We never knew before how much we missed them. We were going home and wanted them to go too.” (Johnson 1919)

*When we awoke on the morning of the 20th and went up on deck, land, our own native land was in sight. We could hardly have been happier if we*

*had seen our own homes. Passing between Capes Charles and Henry, we steamed through Chesapeake Bay and into Hampton Roads. We were met at Newport News by delegations from North and South Carolina, and a committee representing the citizens of Newport News. (Johnson 1919)*

Disembarking in the. U.S.



Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.

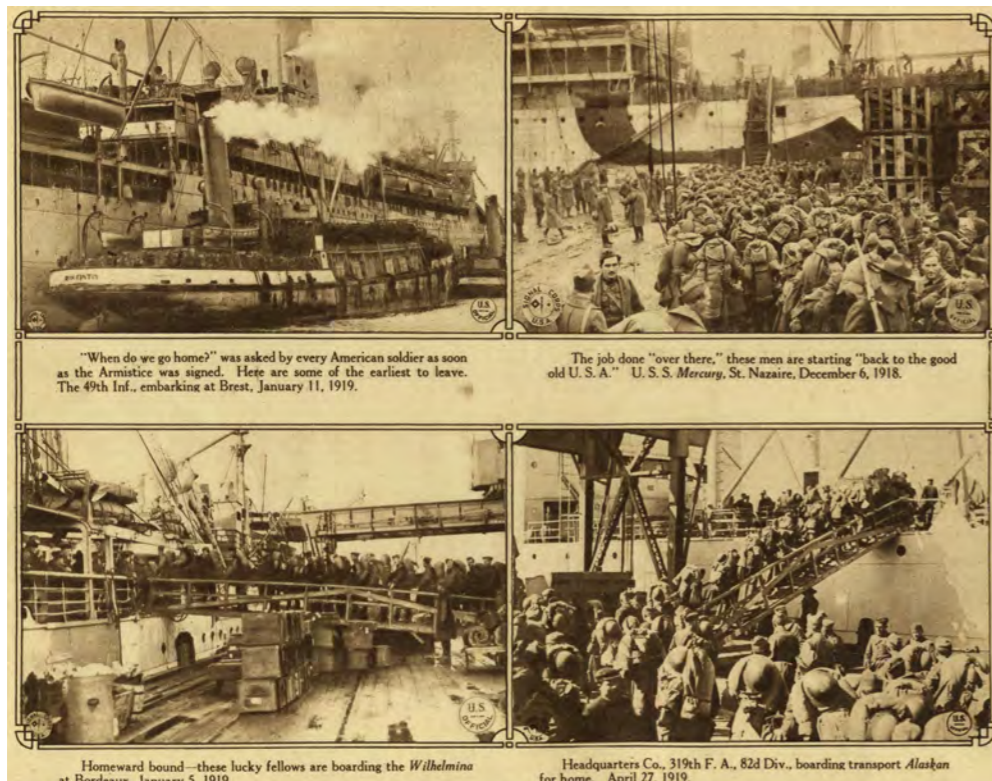
After spending four days being deloused, inspected and fitted out with new clothes, we were sent to camps nearest our homes to be discharged. We realized that we would never be together again as a regiment. When we reached the camps in which we were to be mustered out, only a few hours lay between us and that much desired piece of paper bearing the words: 'Honorable Discharge from the United States Army.

Over half the States of the Union were represented in the regiment. Men who belonged to the same squad or who had lived in the same billet for months, were from states widely separated. They realized that they would very probably never see each other again. Strong friendships had been formed – the one thing that had saved many a soldier from despair and perhaps suicide. (Johnson 1919)

Friday, June 27, 1919 - Return



Troops Walking Off Ship



"When do we go home?" was asked by every American soldier as soon as the Armistice was signed. Here are some of the earliest to leave. The 49th Inf., embarking at Brest, January 11, 1919.

The job done "over there," these men are starting "back to the good old U. S. A." U. S. S. *Mercury*, St. Nazaire, December 6, 1918.

Homeward bound—these lucky fellows are boarding the *Wilhelmina* at Bordeaux, January 5, 1919.

Headquarters Co., 319th F. A., 82d Div., boarding transport *Alaskan* for home. April 27, 1919.

Source: U.S. Official Pictures of the World War.

**Teacher Note:** Use the following questions after reading section three (Soldier Life After the Armistice) of Will McGuirt’s story to facilitate discussion about life after the armistice for soldiers in France:

- What do you think was going through the minds of soldiers as many of them made a 175 kilometer hike back to the base camps?
- Most people think that when the armistice was official that all the soldiers immediately went home. According to this section, what actually happened after the armistice?
- Read the article from the Monroe Journal. How is the end of the war depicted according to the article? How is this different from the soldier’s perspective?

- Describe the ways that soldiers created a community in France after the war was over.
- What can you infer about the importance of camaraderie in military divisions based on the covers of the “Wildcat” magazine?
- How does the story about Will McGuirt and the potato demonstrate the unique relationship between the soldier and French villager during World War I?

Check out the photos from the [ABMC Blue Book PDF](#) (p. 212 – 217) to view pictures of soldiers returning from combat as well as pictures of French villages post-combat.

## Life After War

Will McGuirt returned home to Monroe, NC and married Ona Mae, who lived about 5 miles away. He and five of his brothers played music, mostly country music tunes and hymns, on Saturday nights at a country store. People would gather and visit and share news. Four McGuirt brothers married four of the Griffin sisters; their children called themselves the “double first cousins” and grew up close together. Times were changing

Life After War



*Married Life. Source: McGuirt Family Archives.*





and the men who had fought in the war came back realizing that things could be different than the life of family farming. Cotton mills were springing up in North Carolina and in nearby Fort Mill, South Carolina. Colonel Springs had one of the biggest mills and a package deal to offer workers. Fort Mill promised a mill house and a good job, especially for men like Will who had mechanical aptitude and could be taught to fix looms and equipment in the mill. Ona later said that she cried and cried the night before they

left the country, where she and Will grew up and where everyone they knew also lived. But Will had ambition after he returned from the war. He knew there was something else besides farming for him out there. Will McGuirt died on Jan 23, 1983. On his tombstone is listed U.S. Army, World War I. The final engraving symbolizes how important the war was in his life.

**Teacher Note:** Use the following questions after reading section four (Homeward Bound) of Will McGuirt's story to facilitate discussion about soldiers returning home after wartime:

Why do you think some of the soldiers were sad as they left France, even though they were excited to get home to their families?

How do you think Will McGuirt or other soldiers were changed by their experience in World War I?

There are only three things listed on Will McGuirt's gravestone: his name, the years of his life, and that he was a soldier in World War I. Why do you think this was included on his headstone?

Teachers can check out the [ABMC Burial Database](#) to view other soldiers' headstones. Choose a cemetery and view pictures of individual headstones.

### Soldiers Read Newspapers



Source: U. S. Official Pictures of the World War.

## Communication During World War I

*I hear a lot but I know knowing.* This was a quote that was commonly said among soldiers in the trenches. There were several methods of communication during combat. The role of the runner and the carrier pigeon are two communication methods which provide unique insights on different methods of exchanging information during World War I.

**The Runner:** One of the most effective ways of communicating messages during combat was through the use of a runner. This was considered one of the most dangerous jobs because soldiers had to leave the safety of the trench. Runners wore red arm-bands that were fixed to their arms. Runners not only carried messages between trenches but they also gained knowledge about surrounding areas. Most runners worked at night when they were not as clearly identifiable. Adolf Hitler was a runner for the Germans during World War I. Runners were often awarded for their bravery. The following are quotes about the role of a runner during World War I.

The quotes are from the book, *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die* by Elton Mackin:

*"We had heard tales about the runners – the risks they took, the price they paid. Not without reason were they included*

*among the elite details that formed the "suicide squad." We understood that the work, except in an emergency, was voluntary, and that no man need accept the job as a regular assignment if he preferred otherwise. Of all the risks we had heard about along the front, we were of one mind concerning the job those fellows did. "No runner job for us – too dangerous" (Mackin 1994)*

*"Fear and protest stirred within him; tried to help him find a good excuse. A fellow didn't have to take a runner job. All a fellow had to do was say no. Except in a pinch, where there was neither time nor choice, no one served as a runner except a volunteer, for many vital things depended upon the men carrying the messages." (Mackin 1994)*

### Carrier Pigeons:

Since radio transmissions were in their earliest stages, carrier pigeons were often used by both sides to carry messages to different areas. Many

pigeons were trained to carry messages from the front lines back to headquarters. Telephone lines would often be destroyed during combat or left behind once troops had moved forward (or retreated). While new lines were being laid, pigeons were used to carry messages. Pigeons were trained to learn certain routes, therefore, they could only be used in areas where the same direction would be used for a long period of time.

### Runners and Communication



*Meuse-Argonne Cemetery superintendent Dave Bedford explains the importance of runners and communication in World War I.*

## Communication



Searching the first lot of prisoners for papers and weapons before turning them into the prison pens at Menil-la-Tour. Intelligence officers searched every scrap of paper found on prisoners for information that would reveal enemy plans. The stockades here shown were erected several

*Soldiers Search for Enemy Plans. Source: U. S. Official Pictures of the World War.*



## Past versus Present Communication

How has communication changed over the years? Modern methods of communicating during warfare can include traditional methods such as radio, phone calls, and newspapers, but also include GPS, satellite, computers, email, texting and social media. Has this changed the way we view war?

Quote from LT Sid Gullede about communication now as an active service member of the United States Navy:

What is communication like when you are on deployment? Can you make phone calls, send emails?

*“Deployments (ie underway from homeport greater than 90 days) are typically the time when communication can be difficult. The average deployment time for ships now is 7-8 months. During that time you have no face to face communication with friends and family. Fortunately, internet and satellite phones allow for email and phone calls. I usually will use email or Facebook to communicate back home and is almost immediate and available 24 hours a day. Phone communication is not as reliable and will vary based upon where we are geographically and what missions we are doing.”*

## Reflections



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## Conclusion

Narrative inquiry investigates the power of a story to provide meaning about significant moments in our lives. Why people share certain stories or how stories are constructed provides insight into community, society, and even family values. As we strive as educators to “bring the war back home” to the classroom, narrative inquiry is a method to help students understand the complex topics involved in war. In my own research, I wanted to

## Placing Potato at the Grave



understand why my Great Grandfather told a story about a potato that was then passed down through my family about World War I. My inquiry into the history of this story uncovered a narrative that has broadened my own understanding of the war. The potato story was a simple way for my Great Grandfather to explain the complicated relationships that exist during wartime. Will McGuirt’s family couldn’t understand the complicated dynamics of being in a country where you didn’t speak the language or fighting for people you had never met. The potato story was his way of expressing and processing the war. While my great-grandfather was fortunate

to survive the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, others were not. This became even more poignant as I walked through the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France. The memorial helps to keep their service to our country and sacrifice alive. Through the story of Will McGuirt, students can ask their own questions about the life of a soldier, or they can inquire about the stories of other soldiers, including the ones buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. It is this pedagogical approach that ignites my energy to understand World War I.

## Reflection



# Instructional Menu

This chapter is designed to use the pedagogical approach of narrative inquiry in a 6-12 classroom. This process requires students to read a personal narrative and ask/answer specific questions related to the story. Analytical questions allow for higher level discussions to develop a broader understanding of World War I and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Alternatively, teachers can have students conduct narrative inquiry about other soldiers from their own area, state or region. Below are instructions for both types of instructional strategies as well as suggestions for additional extension activities using primary sources from Will McGuirt’s narrative.

## Narrative Inquiry with the Story of Will McGuirt

Will McGuirt’s story is divided into four sections. Use some or all of the questions listed at the end of each section labeled “Teacher Notes.” In addition, students can submit their own questions about different aspects of his life in each section.

## Primary Source Mini Lessons

**Photo Story Analysis.** Analyze one or more images about the soldier's experience in World War I. Use any of the photographs

in this chapter. Use the “World War I Photo Worksheet” to analyze the photo.

### Photo Analysis Worksheet

*Tap or click the image to view the document.*

**“Wildcat” Newsletter Analysis:** Use the cover pages of the “Wildcat” [81st Divisional Newsletter images](#) to make inferences about the values of the division. Select one of the three editions. Use the ““Wildcat” Newsletter Worksheet” to analyze the newsletter.

## “Wildcat” Newsletter Worksheet

81<sup>st</sup> Division Wildcat Newsletter Analysis Worksheet

Directions: Chose one of the three Wildcat Newsletter Cover Images. Answer the following questions about the newsletter.

Observation

1. Study the newsletter for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the newsletter and then examine individual items.
2. Use the chart to list people, objects and activities in the newsletter.

People	Objects	Activities

Inferences

3. Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this newsletter.

Narrative Inquiry

4. What questions does this newsletter raise in your mind?

**Soldier Letters.** Read two letters written by soldiers who fought in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and are buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. One letter is written by Oliver Ingersol and the other one by Harry Ingersol; both were infantry soldiers. Compare both primary sources. Use the “World War I Letter Worksheet” to compare and analyze the two letters.

## Letter from Oliver

COPY

(Written on  
American  
Y.M.C.A.  
stationery)

Prusly-Villotte  
France

Feb. 8, 1919

Dear Papa and Mama:

We are now having the coldest weather that we have had since the winter season arrived. It is so cold that I have to break the water in my pitcher before I can wash in the mornings and I always sleep "Chapel Hill" style, that is with all my clothes on top of the bed.

We had a battalion inspection this morning and my ears were almost frozen off when it was over. It took me all the rest of to-day to get thawed out and then three "Y" women and one man came out to entertain us during the evening and after spending two hours seated in a barn watching the performance I reached the point where cold no longer had any effect on me. The show was good and all the men enjoyed it, but it was too cold even to make love.

We are receiving all kinds of equipment now and there must be some reason for it. Although it is reported that we are to go to Le Mans within five weeks we have heard nothing definite and they may be getting ready to send us to Russia or Germany. We are comfortably billeted here, but if the call comes we are ready to go anywhere.

I am going about my duties as usual, but my knee is not as strong as it was before I was wounded. In two weeks I believe it will be normal, but as yet I am not taking any violent exercise with it. It never worries or pains me any now.

In one of your letters you said it would surprise you if I did not receive some recognition for the fighting that I did. Well you know I didn't do any more than anyone else would have done, so I didn't expect any. You must remember that the 81st Division is composed of fighting men - just like all our other line divisions. However this morning I received a notice that I had been recommended for the "Croix de Guerre" by Gen. McFarland at Brigade Hdq. and that I had been awarded same. So I will come home the proud wearer of the "Croix de Guerre". Lt. Shea of my company was also awarded the "Croix de Guerre". Only six men and officers in my Battalion are to receive this decoration. I don't know whether to ask for a leave now or not, for I want to be present when they are given out.

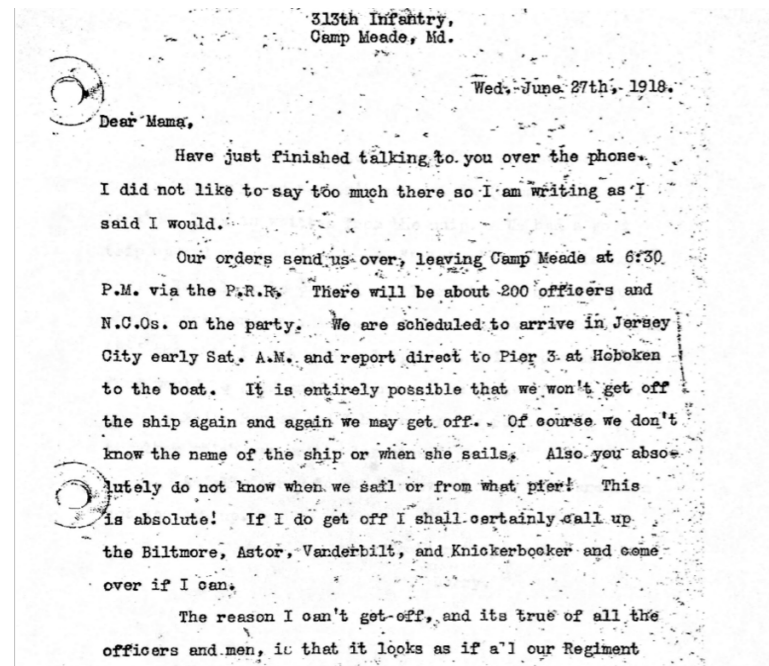
Yes, I was overdrawn at the bank. I wrote you and told you so about six months ago but my letter must have been lost. Something is wrong with the mail now or all my friends must have stopped writing to me, for I never get any mail. If I don't get some mail soon I am going to stop writing to everybody except you and Mama. Katherine has been very nice about writing.

With love to all, I am

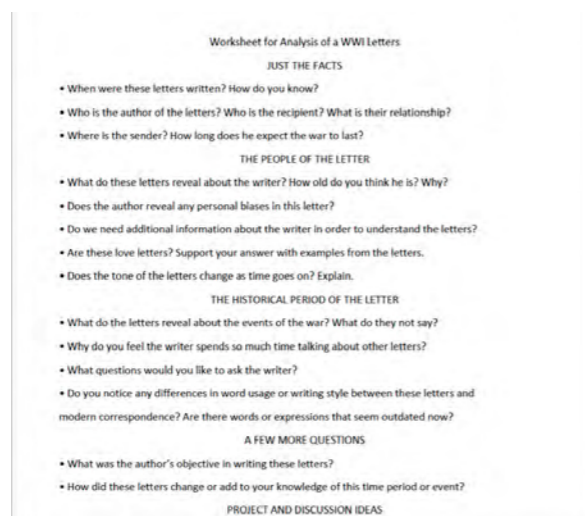
Your son

(Signed) Oliver

## Letter from Harry



## World War I Letter Worksheet



**Poetry Analysis.** Read the poem, “[A Transport Sails for France](#)” by *A.E. F. Soldier’s Mother*. Read the poem to evaluate the theme of family during World War I. What concerns does the mother have for her son? What kind of language is used in the poem? What does this poem tell us about family values during World War I? Another activity to go along with this poem is to check out the [story about the Gold Starmothers](#) who visited France after the war.

## Narrative Inquiry: Research of Soldiers in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive

**Writing Narrative History:** “Narrative history asks you to tell a story: when, where and why a certain event occurred, its larger significance or context, and who the important participants were.” This activity requires students to go through the process of narrative inquiry. Follow the instructions below to have your students create their own narratives about soldiers that fought in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

**Step One:** Each student should find the name of a soldier of interest from their local county or state to research. Use the [ABMC online database](#) to look up soldiers who are buried in the Meuse-Argonne cemetery. Using the search results, you can narrow the search by state of origin. Students can then search for their particular state or area of interest. The search results will provide the name, rank and burial plot number for the soldier.



**Step Two:** Using the rank of the chosen soldier, students can use the [ABMC Blue Book PDF](#) to find specific information about their soldier's division and regiment location during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign.

**Step Three:** Use the [ABMC Timeline](#) to gain an overall understanding of the role of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in the context of World War I.

**Step Four:** Use different online resources to continue researching the individual soldier. The following are suggestions for excellent resources to visit. Most of the resources are free if you register.

[Genealogy.com](#)

[Ancestryk12.com](#) – You will need to apply for a grant for free access to Ancestry's databases.

[NationalArchives.gov](#)

[Fold3.com](#)

[Newspapers.com](#) can be used to look up specific newspapers from World War I that were printed from the area of the particular soldier.

**Step Five:** Students use the research to recreate their own narrative about the soldier. Students can write the story with a first person perspective or create an historical narrative about the soldier. Presentation methods may vary.

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## Section 8

# Video Transcriptions

### Video from the Day in Moranville

Man: [speaking in French]

Translator woman: His parents, they will get married at a time that meant

Man: [French]

Translator woman: They fled near- [French]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: And when they came back everything was destroyed

Man: [French]

Translator woman: All the whole village

Man: [French]

Translator woman: Everything was-

Man: [French]

Translator woman: [French] He is emotional

Katie: I know, I know

Translator woman: Everything has been rebuilt from the twenties. 23, 24. And even the church was destroyed. You're making me cry now

Katie: Sorry

Woman 2: Except the bell. Yeah, one of the bells fell in the water and didn't break. It's why it didn't break. But there is a shell- you can see the back of a shell

Translator woman: Yeah, the shell. [French]

Woman 2: My brother told me that, he told me he saw the bell and he said 'we cannot really see you know the impact on the bell.' [French]

Man: [French]

[sniffling sounds]

Translator woman: We can see [inaudible] for the King [I think]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: He's born in 29.

Man: [French]

Translator woman: [French]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: He found shells everywhere and there are some-

Man: [French]

Translator woman: [French]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: They found, they kept some. But if they had kept all of them there would be no room

Katie: Yeah.

Man: [French]

Translator woman: If you start to do your whole buildings you will start to find shells.

Katie: Uh huh

Man: [French]

Translator woman: He was agricultural, so he has a tractor, and every time he went in the field he still had the pick axe because he knew he would have to pick up

Man: [French]

Translator woman: At the bottom of the plow, otherwise, every day you will find at least one. Sometimes they were still intact.

Man: [French]

Translator woman: OK. And if it's still intact-

Man: [French]

Translator woman: If it's when that is still intact, you say to the mayor, and the mayor will organize for the, on time, mine the people from it?

Katie: Right right

Translator woman: To come and pick it up. But they won't come all the time so you will start them in a place, and then we come

Man: [French]

Translator woman: He says I am [truck sound, words inaudible]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: You can work the same field for years and you won't find anything and suddenly one will appear.

Man: [French]

Translator woman: He said that they were in tact mainly because the, when the ground was soft and silty, then the shell would just go and the fuse would not go off. And then the shell would bury itself.

Kate: Would you ask him, maybe what it was like for his parents to come back to a village that was ruined?

Man: [French]

Translator woman: [French]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: [French]

Man: [French]

Translator woman: At first they left, they lived in a

Man: [French]

Translator woman: the barracks

Man: [French]

Translator woman: Barracks not even houses

Man: [French]

Translator woman: At first the houses were down and then the soil, the ground was completely destroyed. So it took time to level everything and then to rebuild everything.

Man: [French]

Woman: Is there anything else you want to ask? [French]

Man: [French]

Woman 2: [French]

Man: [French]

[Woman 2 and man talking together in French]

Translator woman: All he knows is his parents, what his parents say.

[Translator woman and man talking together in French]

[traffic noises]

### **Runners and Communication**

Dave Bedford, ABMC Meuse-Argonne Cemetery Superintendent:  
You guys are killing me. People love this stuff, some of the guys love this - "yeah, let me comb my hair."

Katie: You look like be all end of World War I. You are our guru.

Mike Bamford, Videographer: You are our guru

Dave: No I'm not, I'm a guide. I have the time to study this stuff, you guys will be surpassed me by millions of light-years.

Katie: OK, so in your opinion what method of communication was the most vital in warfare?

Dave: The most vital, that's an interesting question. Because... The most used would depend upon the level. For the individual foot soldier, the individual soldier that carried a gun was the runner. Absolutely. In some of my research I looked through there, and I was amazed at the number of distinguish service crosses that were awarded to the runners. I'm going wow, what a terrible, what a terrible thing. When we look at individual battles like the lost battalion, the reason that they became lost- they kind of knew where they were, but they weren't totally lost- was because the runner, the communication network was severed. So, those runners were critical. And that's at the soldier usable level. And some of the most, some of the best stories that I ever read is by the messengers because the messengers were able to get up and go from one position to the next so they, they naturally processed and collected information, and they understood the battlefield a little bit better than the regular infantrymen that's looking right to his front.

Mike: One second, ok cool

Katie: And I've read a lot about these messenger centers being set up in villages, can you tell me a little bit about those?

Dave: Message centers were basically a switch board. Because once you got to a certain level they were used quite a bit in artillery fire, adjusting artillery fire. So at a certain level you had to have one of those old switchboards with the plug in devices and all of that. And that's what they're probably talking about with the message centers. Without me having read the specific texts I wouldn't be able to tell 100%, but that's what they're alluding to, because the radio didn't exist back there. We've seen a photo of a radio in the official photos, but I have yet to have heard of any transmissions vocally. We're basically going with a guy stringing wires between here and the front 14 kilometers back. [Dog barks in background] Or a transferring by a, transferring by runners. So, the message [dog barks] yes dog. HE's ready to go for a walk, he's giving me a message. [laughter] [Speaks to dog in French] So the message centers were critical. Because they transmitted information primarily to the infantry that needed the support from cannons or logistics to be brought forward. Those message centers were the literal wires into a spot where they had to connect to the next spot to procure logistic support or artillery support.

Katie: And how quickly could those be put up? And take down, or moved?

Dave: I'm not sure, I've never seen any statistics on that. That's a little bit more technical than I know about the message centers. I imagine- they had them in trucks. So as fast as they can run lines in, they'd know where the connections would go, they were experienced in what connections had to go where. They'd label that this one came from this regiment and that one went to this battery, this artillery battery, so yeah I imagine it would be relatively quick.

Katie: There's a phrase from a soldier that was quoted saying we heard a lot but nothing, could you comment?

Dave: That could be from today's soldier. And you're talking about the rumors. But that's probably particularly after the war, because during the war and when you're engaged you're, you're engaged and you have only one objective and that's in front of you and you can't be worried about the rumors that are coming from the back, and those rumors don't exist. But in the quiet times, the soldiers start worrying. They worry about where they're going or are thinking about where they're going next. Are they coming out of line? That, so, that would be a classic quote from someone who's not in a line. I don't know if you can edit sound like dogs out.

Mike: He's a good boy

Dave: I'll go knock him out [whistles] [Woman speaks in French, he answers in French]

Katie: And just finally, just commenting on how much those back home really knew about what was going on.

Dave: I have to refer to the historians, Moser is one of those writers who writes about that very critically, highly critical that the military kept basically secrets from the governments as to what was happening in the war, and also therefore to the people. Whether, on whatever side. We can talk about the allies for sure, there was, France was divided into two zones. The zone of the interior and the zone of the armies. The zone of the armies was basically the zone of combat, no one was allowed to go in there without somebody being- a journalist was led by the hand to a specific spot to see and witness specific battles that of course would favor the allies' effort.

Kate: And one last thing, I just read something in a book "Suddenly we didn't want to die." And it has

Dave: A messenger

Kate: Right. And it had a moment where the main characters asked would you be a runner, and he talks about having visions that were scary but agrees to do it. Was it a, something of an honor to be asked to do that? Would you suppose?

Dave: I imagine so, it took a certain sense. Because you have a certain amount of liberty and you've got to go from one point to the next. You have to remember where you were before and hope that where you were going was back at that point. Or you'd have to

have a sense of direction. Maps were not that ready, readily available at the time. So no I think that was to a certain degree an honor but also incredibly dangerous.

Mike: Rock and roll.

## **Placing Potato at the Grave**

I'm here at Will McGuirt's grave to give him something. It's a potato that I got in the village of Moranville, in France, from a French farmer. Who after hearing the story that is the center of my research, graciously went to his farm and dug up a potato. And I'm here to give it back to Will McGuirt. It's a thank you for everything that he did to give, for our country. And it also represents, to me, what all the American soldiers gave on behalf of our country. And this potato took me on this journey that allowed me to get to know my Great-Grandfather, as well as other soldiers. And, that's what a story can do. And so, I learned that a power of a story allows us to, a glimpse or perspective into understanding things that have happened in our past.

### **Reflections**

Katie: So my name is Katie Gullledge, and I am a history teacher. I am a middle school history teacher, I've been teaching for about seven years. In the Triangle, both in Raleigh and in Chapel Hill and about to start in Cary at my new school. I went to UNC-

Chapel Hill, where I majored in education, and feel fortunate to be a Tarheel. My mom also is a professor in education at UNC-Chapel Hill. So I'm sort of connected to UNC in several ways. I got involved in this project for various ways but am very interested experiential education. Wanted to really conduct sort of research that was experiential. And I have a unique position in that I, at the start of this project, wasn't really aware very much about my great grandfather who fought in World War I. I knew that he did, but I didn't know anything else. Nor did I feel very connected to him beyond that I knew he was a relative. And he's my mom's grandfather. So when I started this project I didn't know really anything about him. I knew a little bit about World War I, what the history books tell you, but struggled with how to bring that home to the classroom. Because really I didn't feel that connected to it. And so, I sort of went on this journey not knowing what I would discover. And before I came here I remember Cynthia West, in her presentation she was giving, said this cool quote. And she said storytelling is really the DNA of human existence. And I think especially with World War I all we have our stories, but often these stories you don't here. And so, I really think reflecting on this week there's so much power and historical narratives. And really historical narratives, researching, looking at documents and sort of getting in the eyes of a soldier or someone who was there, it bridges this gap. This gap that can be there when you're just reading some a summary or hearing a lecture. And somehow connection informs. It's impossible not to feel emotional when you are sort of inside the mind of a soldier. And of course particular for



me, I'm related to someone who was there and in it. And so, it's that emotional connection that I think where real learning can happen. And you almost can't even explain it, it's a feeling. That I know everybody here will always have. And if we can bring that back to the classroom, through historical narratives and develop that emotion, that connection, that intimacy, then that's where, that's where the learning is. That's what I hope to bring back home.

Mike: Let's talk about the trip.

Katie: Ok

Mike: Let's talk about the personal things that happened on this trip. Uh, and what that means to you.

Katie: I think that I expected to know more about my great grandfather. I didn't expect to have all these feelings of pride, and sort of just feeling his courage. And in that, channeling that, also feeling the courage of my mom, feeling sort of the appreciation for other members of my family that have served. Just this, overall feeling of gratitude to be a part of the family that I'm in.

Mike: Take a second.

Katie: I couldn't help but think about my brother, who is active in the military while I was here. And really for the first time feeling like I understood him, too. So, it hit home for sure with me.

Mike: Take a deep breath

Katie: OK.

Mike: I know, you're working me up too, [laughter] OK, cause now I'm going to ask you the hard one.

Katie: OK

Mike: Tell me about the potato.

Katie: [laughs]

Mike: And that day specifically. Let's talk about that day, getting into that car with Stephanie, that connection and all that.

Katie: I think the- what I came away from that day was about the power of a place. That we go to places, and we have places that are important in our lives and that place matters. And when I walked into this village where I just felt that he had been there. And I don't know why. And, it's overpowering. And there were other people I met that day that had felt that same power for a different reason. About a place. And so when I was talking to this farmer, and there was someone translating, and all I had heard was this story about him trying to communicate, and I was struggling so on how to communicate, I just felt him. And then, because the story centered around a potato, a potato that, potato's something we don't think about, you find it anywhere. And that was the motivating sort of object, something that we take for

granted that that was the quest. I don't know, it kind of came full circle. That it was that. That led me on this journey. So to finally hold this potato, I don't know, it made it real.

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